DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 213 SO 020 440

AUTHOR Crosby, Alfred W.; Nader, Helen
TITLE The Voyages of Columbus: A Turning Point in World History.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.; Indiana Humanities Council, Indianapolis.; Indiana Univ., Bloomington. Social Studies Development Center.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-941339-08-4
PUB DATE Oct 89
CONTRACT RI88062009
NOTE 48p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publications Manager, Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University, 2805 East Tenth St., Bloomington, IN 47405 ($6.00, plus $1.00 postage and handling).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); American Indians; Animals; Biographies; Chronicles; Diseases; Ecological Factors; *Ecology; *Economic Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Environment; Environmental Influences; North American History; Primary Sources; Resource Materials; *Social Change; Social History; Western Civilization; *World History
IDENTIFIERS *Biological Impact; *Columbus (Christopher); Native Americans; Plants (Botany)

ABSTRACT

The far-reaching and transforming interactions of the Old World and the New are known today as "the Columbian Exchange." Part 1 of this booklet is an introduction by John J. Patrick dealing with teaching about the voyages of Christopher Columbus. Part 2, "Columbus and Ecological Imperialism," by Alfred W. Crosby, provides an ecological perspective on the conditions and consequences of the Columbian exchange. It discusses how plants, pathogens, and animals moved from one hemisphere to the other and changed natural environments and cultures. The devastating effects of Old World microbes on New World peoples and the subsequent shifts in the genetic composition of populations in the Americas are described. Part 3, "Christopher Columbus: The Hero and the Historian," by Helen Nader points out that one key to understanding the Columbian voyages and their consequences is accurate information about Columbus and his deeds. This requires reliable documents, but in the past, the editions and translations of the pertinent documents have not been trustworthy. Nader uses her own translation of the "Book of Royal Privileges" to provide a reinterpretation of the history of Columbus and his accomplishments. Two abbreviated versions of these primary sources are presented in the appendix along with a chronology of events in the life of Columbus, the family tree of Columbus, and a map of the first voyage of Columbus. The document concludes with a 29-item bibliography. (JB)

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The Voyages of Columbus: A Turning Point in World History

by

Alfred W. Crosby

and

Helen Nader

With an Introduction by John J. Patrick

SO 020 440

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October 1989

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This publication is available from

Publications Manager
Social Studies Development Center
Indiana University
2805 East Tenth Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47405
(812) 855-3838

This publication was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education. Co-publishers are the Indiana Humanities Council and the Social Studies Development Center.

ISBN 0-941339-08-4

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No. RI88062009. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.

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About the Authors

Alfred W. Crosby is a professor of American studies at the University of Texas, Austin. His publications include *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, *Epidemic and Peace, 1918*, and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Professor Crosby has won prizes for his work from the Medical Writers' Association, the Texas Institute of Letters, and Phi Beta Kappa.

Helen Nader is a professor of history at Indiana University, Bloomington, where she also is Associate Dean for Research. Professor Nader has participated in the development of a new edition of the *Repertorium Columbianum*, a twelve-volume collection of documents about the conditions and consequences of Columbus's voyages to the New World; Volume Four, *Christopher Columbus's Book of Royal Privileges*, was translated and edited by Professor Nader. She also serves as head of the American Historical Association's committee on the Columbus Quincentennial.

John J. Patrick, author of the "Introduction," is a professor of education and director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education at Indiana University, Bloomington. He also is director of Indiana University's Social Studies Development Center. Professor Patrick served as director of a 1989 project, *Teaching about the Voyages of Columbus: A Turning Point in World History*, which was funded by the Indiana Humanities Council with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Acknowledgments

Development of this publication was initiated through a joint project of the Social Studies Development Center and the Renaissance Studies Program of Indiana University. This project—*Teaching about the Voyages of Columbus*—was funded by the Indiana Humanities Council with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A one-day conference—April 6, 1989 at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana—was organized by the project director, John J. Patrick. Eighty-one social studies educators participated in this conference, which was conducted in association with the annual meeting of the Indiana Council for the Social Studies. The two main speakers at the conference were Alfred W. Crosby and Helen Nader. The papers they prepared for this conference have been revised and edited through the publications program of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education (ERIC/ChESS), a program funded by the U.S. Department of Education that is conducted by the Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University.

The following individuals reviewed and reacted to the papers by Crosby and Nader as participants in the one-day conference at Ball State University: Richard Aquila, professor of history at Ball State University; Carl Siler, history teacher at Muncie South High School; Andrew Cayton, professor of history at Ball State University; and Victor Smith, supervisor of social studies for the Indianapolis Public Schools. Evelyn R. Holt, executive director of the Indiana Council for the Social Studies, and Carl Siler also reviewed this work during the editorial development and completion of this publication.

The map on the *First Voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World* was reprinted from *The Indianapolis Star*, August 22, 1988. Permission to use this map was provided through the service of Ann W. Ely, Newspaper in Education Coordinator, *The Indianapolis Star* and *The Indianapolis News*.

Funding for this publication was provided by the Indiana Humanities Council with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education. The encouragement and support of Kenneth L. Gladish, executive director of the Indiana Humanities Council, is greatly appreciated and valued.

The De Orchi Portrait of Columbus.

I

Introduction: Teaching about the Voyages of Columbus

by John J. Patrick

The quincentennial of Christopher Columbus's first voyage across the Western Ocean is nearly upon us. In 1992, we will celebrate and cerebrate in response to the pivotal events of 1492. Historians agree that Columbus's voyage had profound global consequences. After 1492, peoples and civilizations began to develop linkages that led to the incipient global community of the late twentieth century. Cultural interactions were inaugurated that have continuously moved and mixed ideas, goods, and peoples between the Old World and the New World to create one world.

The "Columbian Exchange"—a Powerful Idea in the Teaching and Learning of World History

The far-reaching and transforming interactions of the Old World and the New are known today as "the Columbian Exchange"—the title of a seminal book by Alfred W. Crosby. In his groundbreaking book (*The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, p. 3), Crosby points out that, "The connection between the Old and New Worlds...became on the twelfth day of October 1492 a bond as significant as the Bering land bridge had once been. The two worlds...which were so very different began on that day to become alike. That trend toward biological homogeneity is one of the most important aspects of the history of life on this planet since the retreat of the continental glaciers."

Crosby provides an ecological perspective on the conditions and consequences of the Columbian voyages. In Part II of this publication ("Columbus and Ecological Imperialism"), he discusses how plants, pathogens, and animals moved from one hemisphere to the other and changed natural environments and cultures. He describes the devastating effects of Old World microbes on New World peoples and the subsequent shifts in the genetic composition of populations in the Americas. However, Crosby emphasizes that "the Columbian Exchange" was not one-sided. Certainly European plants, animals, goods, and ideas affected the Amerindians. But

peoples of the New World influenced the Europeans too, especially in their cultivation of crops and preparation of foods.

Elementary and secondary school teachers should use Crosby's concept of "the Columbian Exchange" to help their students acquire an ecological perspective on world history. Thus, they will learn how cultural diffusion and social changes have shaped our modern world. And they will understand Crosby's most important message: once begun, "the Columbian Exchange" cannot be reversed. The Columbian voyages and the subsequent Age of Exploration and Discovery have forged inseparable bonds between once separated peoples and civilizations, and there is no turning back.

Global interdependence, the ties that bind the world's peoples, is a critically important reality of our modern age, which our students must learn if they would be prepared intelligently to face the future. To convey the reality of our incipient global society to students, elementary and secondary school teachers must emphasize true turning points of world history—events of universal, not merely of national or local, significance. Among the undisputed events of universal significance, which therefore should be taught in depth to all students in elementary and secondary schools, are the conditions and consequences of the Columbian voyages.

Teaching and Learning about Columbus

One key to understanding the Columbian voyages and their consequences is accurate information about Columbus and his deeds. Teachers and students need to distinguish the many myths from realities about the life and times of Columbus. Helen Nader highlights this point in Part III of this publication, "Christopher Columbus: The Hero and the Historian." If we would know the man and his story, we need reliable documents. According to Nader, "The documents are abundant, but the editions and translations have not been trustworthy. Accurate editions of the contracts between Columbus and Ferdinand and Isabella have never been readily available to historians, let alone to the general public."

Professor Nader has collaborated with other researchers to provide "trustworthy documents" on the voyages of Columbus. They are producing a new edition of the *Repertorium Columbianum*, a twelve-volume collection of documents, including Columbus's letters and memoranda and his agreements with the Spanish government. These volumes will be published in 1992. In Part III, Nader has drawn upon evidence in Volume Four of this set, *Christopher Columbus's Book of Royal Privileges*, to provide a reinterpretation of the history of the hero, Columbus, and his accomplishments. Nader stresses that the *Book of Royal Privileges* is the legal foundation for Spanish colonization of the Americas. Thus,

teachers and students who would understand Columbus's role in this colonization must draw upon evidence in the *Book of Royal Privileges*.

Secondary school teachers can enrich their lessons about Columbus by using abbreviated versions of primary sources, such as the documents in the *Book of Royal Privileges*. Two examples of this material, translated by Helen Nader, are presented in the Appendix. Professor Nader urges teachers to use these materials in their secondary school history courses: "By distributing these translations to you, the teachers who are actually on the front lines of interpreting the past to students, I hope to discover if the texts themselves, the narratives as they were written down at the time of the discovery, will make a difference. If having access to these documents in reliable editions and translations changes the way we see Columbus as a hero and makes possible new interpretations, then the historical consequences of his enterprise can themselves become a new adventure of discovery."

Challenges for Teachers

The Columbian quincentennial, the five hundredth anniversary of the European discovery of a New World, can be an occasion for renewal and reform of education about a critical turning point in world history. The quincentennial can be viewed as an opportunity to confront the challenges of significantly improving teaching and learning about the voyages of Columbus in elementary and secondary schools.

At present, Columbus enjoys a secure place in the curricula of elementary and secondary schools. But instruction about him and his achievements is often routine and trivial. It typically suffers from superficial and sometimes inaccurate recounting of details. And it all too rarely engages students in examination of documents, the real stuff of historical inquiry. Teachers should confront the challenge of using primary sources effectively to teach about the conditions and consequences of the Columbian voyages.

Teachers should also accept the challenge of reading and researching about the life and times of Columbus to provide themselves and their students with accurate information and up-to-date interpretations. The Select Bibliography at the end of this publication has been prepared to assist teachers who are ready to accept the challenge of continued self-education about Columbus, his achievements and their consequences.

Finally, teachers should accept the challenge of providing a multi-dimensional view of the life and times of Columbus and the results of his deeds. Teaching and learning about Columbus has often been one-sided and uni-dimensional. We have tended to provide a narrow, Euro-centric view of the Columbian voyages and

their consequences and to gloss over or ignore perspectives of Amerindians and Africans. We have also tended to focus primarily or exclusively on details of the life and achievements of Columbus and to overlook the complex and continuous consequences of his voyages to the New World, especially the relationships between biological and cultural consequences. Teachers can address these deficiencies by incorporating into the curriculum Crosby's concept of "the Columbian Exchange" and his ecological perspective on history.

However, in attempting to overcome certain weaknesses in the curriculum, we must be careful to avoid inadvertent creation of new deficiencies, such as overemphasizing analytical abstractions and neglecting individuals. In providing students with a fresh ecological perspective on world history, teachers must retain dramatic and incisive narrative about human actors. The challenge is to combine creatively stories of important persons with analysis of impersonal forces in the environment, the ecological context of personal actions that affects and is affected by the deeds of individuals. Good teachers will find ways to combine Crosby's emphasis on analysis of the biological and cultural consequences of 1492 with Nader's concern for accurate portrayals of Columbus and other important persons in the events of that pivotal year.

This publication has been developed to stimulate the thinking and learning of teachers about one of the great turning points of modern world history, the voyages of Columbus. The articles by Crosby and Nader provide new ideas and information that will enable teachers to start moving beyond their textbooks to expand and enrich treatments of Columbus in elementary and secondary schools.

II

Columbus and Ecological Imperialism

by Alfred W. Crosby

In the United States of America the descendants of Europeans and Africans account for the great majority of the population, Asian Americans for a few percentage points, and the original inhabitants, the Native Americans (Amerindians or, if you prefer, Indians), for less than one percent, only one and a half million people. The existence of such an enormous majority of people of Old World stock requires explanation. It is not simply a matter of military conquest, which is a phenomenon common throughout history, but usually without replacement of the conquered people. India is India, despite Kipling. Poland remains Polish, despite all sorts of trampling back and forth by neighbors. The population of Zimbabwe is about as black as it was one hundred or one thousand years ago. But Massachusetts and Connecticut (incidentally, Algonkin words) and Nebraska (an Omaha word) and Mississippi and Alabama and Missouri and Arkansas and Tennessee and Kentucky and Missouri and Iowa and Minnesota and the Dakotas and Kansas and Oklahoma and Utah—all Amerindian words, as are the names of several other states—these lands have majorities of recent immigrants (recent means post-1492) and the offspring of immigrants. How could this be?

An Ecological Perspective

Let us consider the United States *vis-a-vis* location. The fact that all the states, excepting only the late-comers, Hawaii and Alaska, are located within the temperate zone fails to stimulate much in the way of profound insight. As you would expect, the leaders of the Old World invasion of North America, the Europeans, have proved—like their crops and livestock, their styles of raincoats, their types of hand lotion, etc.—to be most successful in lands rather like their home countries in climate.

The United States, while quite similar to Europe in climate, is remote from Europe—on the other side of a deep and ancient ocean. It is a long way from the Old World, and has been so since

the halcyon days of the dinosaurs, with the exception of relatively brief periods of contact with Eurasia via the far north whenever ice ages lowered ocean levels sufficiently.

This remoteness of the New World from the Old has been a matter of time, as well as space, and therefore of biological development. Isolation from Eurasia and Africa has meant isolation from important streams of evolution. For millions of years the biotas of the Old and New Worlds developed independently, divergently. The contrast between the biotas of Africa and South America (a matter, for instance, of the African elephant versus the tapir, South America's biggest quadruped) is much greater than between those of Eurasia and North America, but even in the latter case the difference is impressive and important. Said Peter Kalm, a European naturalist, fresh off the boat in Philadelphia in 1748: "I found that I was now come into a new world. Whenever I looked to the ground I found everywhere such plants as I had never seen before. When I saw a tree, I was forced to stop and ask those who accompanied me, how it was called...."

The divergency of evolution in the Old and New Worlds accelerated when, about ten thousand years ago, humanity invented civilization (a handy, but admittedly vague term), creating new environments, massively altering ecosystems, intentionally and unintentionally developing new sub-species and, in the case of very short-lived organisms, such as many kinds of microlife, entirely new species. During the last ten millennia, the human inhabitants of the strata of the Old World that runs east and west from the Middle Eastern heartland of civilization increased and rose into the millions earlier than in other areas. These pioneers of Old World civilization created regions of dense population earlier than other people. They intentionally domesticated more species of plants than any other people, with the possible exception of Amerindians, and many more species of animals than any other people, without any exceptions. They hemmed their plants, animals, and themselves into dense concentrations—fields of barley, pens of goats, and cities of people—inadvertently creating the rich media and ecological disruptions which led to the selection, evolution, and spread of such "weed" species as those plants we specifically call weeds, and, as well, rats, mice, lice, starlings, disease pathogens, etc. Similar "progress," if that is the word, ensued elsewhere, as other peoples followed the Middle Eastern examples, and as Amerindians in Mesoamerica, Peru, and other places independently and somewhat later invented their own civilizations.

The biota of civilization is different from the biota of the wilderness. To give a single example, humans as roaming hunters and gatherers are only mildly troubled with large varmints, such as rats, because nomads migrate faster and more continually than

rats; but the sedentary people of Old World civilization have had a commensal relationship with rats for thousands of years.

The biotas of humanity's several civilizations are distinctive or, at least, were so until the past few centuries. For instance, the biota of the England of Captain John Smith included horses and smallpox viruses. The biota of the North America of Pocahontas did not. Such differences can be more significant than the presence or absence of the wheel, gunpowder, or the printing press.

The demographic takeover of North America by large numbers of European humans is a part of a general invasion of that continent by a "portmanteau biota," a portable collection of lifeforms that the explorers, colonists, indentured servants, and slaves brought with them, intentionally and unintentionally, and of which the humans were the most articulate, but not always the most important members. To illustrate, let me turn to the eastern third of North America between the Gulf of Mexico and the Hudson Bay. When Europeans first touched the shores of this region (whether Vikings at the turn of the eleventh century or Johnny-come-latelies c. 1500), its biota was significantly different from their homelands. There were none of the Old World crops; no wheat or barley or turnips or peas, and few of the forage grasses and forbs common in European grasslands. There were few species of pine and no domesticated horses, cattle, sheep, goats, nor house cats; nor were there any of the Old World's semi-domesticated rats, mice, house sparrows, starlings, or honey bees. Except for the dog, the Amerindians of this part of North America had none of the animals, and only a few of the pests (body lice, for instance) associated with the Old World's dense populations. Nor did they have many of the pathogens associated with the Old World. They did not live in a germless Eden; there were native American diseases. But they did not suffer from smallpox, measles, chickenpox, influenza, malaria, yellow fever, diphtheria, whooping cough, typhoid fever, scarlet fever, amoebic dysentery, or the other maladies in circulation in the Old World in 1492.

Plants

Columbus and company were bound to bring more than the benefits of Christianity and double entry bookkeeping to America. Let us take a quick look at the chief components of the portmanteau biota as it arrived in North America in this order: plants, animals, pathogens, and finally, people. The first Old World plants to be naturalized in North America probably found a home in Newfoundland, which was visited by European fishermen almost every year from John Cabot's (Giovanni Caboto's) time on. Twenty-three percent of Newfoundland's flora today is European in origin, much of which surely arrived in the ballast dumped by fishing vessels

from England, Brittany, Spain, and Portugal in colonial times. We can also be sure that the sixteenth-century Spanish in Florida and in the abortive settlements in the area of what are now the mid-Atlantic states brought plants with them that went wild, but we cannot be sure of their identity, any more than we can of those which attained naturalization in Newfoundland. The same must be said of the "weeds" of the first English colonies in Carolina and Virginia. We strike our first vein of certainty with Joseph Josselyn, who visited New England in 1638 and 1663 and left us a list "Of Such Plants as Have Sprung Up since the English Planted and Kept Cattle in New England" (couch grass, dandelions, shepherd's purse, groundsel, sow thistle, chickweed, etc.). Amerindians named one of these, plantain (*Plantago major*), the "Englishman's Foot," because they believed that it would grow only where the English "have trodden, and was never known before the English came into this country."

The champions of the Old World weeds in North America were white clover and what we arrogantly called Kentucky blue grass. Mixed together these were known as English grass in colonial times. They spread widely in the colonies from Nova Scotia to the Carolinas, and when Daniel Boone and his fellow pioneers topped the Appalachians in the last decades of the eighteenth century and descended into the valley beyond, they found the two waiting for them in Kentucky and Tennessee. The plants had probably entered the west with the French and possibly the Spanish in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. White clover and Kentucky blue grass continued west until the precipitation decreased on the other side of the Mississippi. They moved west with the domesticated animals, who destroyed the indigenous flora and carried the seeds of the invading flora on their hides and in their bowels. In January of 1832 Lewis D. de Sheinitz told the Lyceum of Natural History of New York that the worst weeds in the United States were foreigners, and provided a list of 137 of them. What is called the worst were, simply put, the most successful at healing over the tears in the ground cover made by immigrant farmers and their livestock.

Oddly, very few plants traveled east from America to Europe and achieved naturalization there. Charles Darwin teased America's premier botanist, Asa Gray, on the subject: "Does it not hurt your Yankee pride that we thrash you so confoundedly? I am sure Mrs. Gray will stick up for your own weeds. Ask her whether they are not more honest, downright good sort of weeds." She countered effectively, answering that American weeds were "modest, woodland, retiring things; and no match for the intrusive, pretentious, self-asserting foreigners." In this she was perfectly correct. The immigrants were stripping away the eastern forest, and its

minor flora could not survive in the open, especially if subjected to the teeth and hooves of the imported livestock.

Animals

For almost every purpose—meat, milk, leather, fiber, power, speed, and even manure—the European domesticated animals were superior to those few species domesticated by Amerindians of either North or South America. The only domesticated animals of the native people of North America were the dog and the turkey. The Europeans and Africans disembarked with horses, cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, asses, chickens, cats, and more, and members of most of these species set off by themselves to make a zoological revolution. They sought out their own food and were self-replicators. Therefore, in the efficiency and speed with which they altered their new environment, they were superior to any machine ever built from that day to this. Swine are omnivorous, and there were more kinds of food available to them in and near the early European settlements in North America (the area north of the Rio Grande) than to any other species of imported animal. They came to the continent no later than 1540 with Hernando de Soto, and were running wild and thriving on the roots and mast of the Gulf coast and hinterland long before Englishmen came ashore at Jamestown or Plymouth. The pigs of Carolina and Virginia, when they went wild a century after Hernando de Soto's, especially fancied the fruit of the peach trees, like themselves also imports. In New England they learned to root for clams. Amerindians despised the pigs because they fouled the clam beds. Swine did well in a great range of environments and weathers, even as far north as France's first successful American colony at Port Royal in Nova Scotia, where they multiplied and often slept out-of-doors in the winter of 1606-07.

After a few generations in the woods, the feral pigs reverted to a type very different from what we are accustomed to seeing in the barnyard. Long-legged, long-snouted, slab-sided, narrow-backed, they were fast and equipped with long, vicious tusks. They earned the same name in America and Australia—razorback—and provided the frontier people with much of their protein for their first generation overseas. Incidentally, pigs today are no different from yesterday's in their ability to go wild. In 1983 an estimated five thousand feral pigs were roaming the Cape Kennedy Space Center in Florida, descendants of the tame swine owned by the local residents whose land NASA had bought in the 1960s. "They are mean animals," said Dorn Whitmore of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. "The leaner and meaner are the best equipped to survive."

Not until the English and French moved onto the vast grasslands of mid-continent North America in the nineteenth century

were the number of their cattle comparable to the herds of New Spain (Mexico), but there were enough of them in the eighteenth century to impress Europeans who had never visited Latin America. Shortly after 1700 John Lawson remarked that the stocks of cattle in Carolina were "incredible, being from one to two thousand Head in one Man's Possession...." A Hispanic *hacendado* would have been embarrassed to acknowledge such a paltry herd, but to an Englishman it was huge. Montreal and Boston had their bovine *avant-garde*, but the cattle propagated more rapidly in the more southerly latitudes. Within thirty years of the founding of Maryland, the settlers were complaining that their stocks of cattle were being "molested by reason of severall heards of wilde Cattle resorting amonge their tame." A couple of human generations later, cattle on the South Carolina and Georgia frontier were moving west.

Amerindian traders and rustlers brought some horses into eastern North America from the prairies and plains, but most came directly from Europe and moved westward with the pioneers of the Thirteen Colonies and New France—or even preceded them. Horses came to Virginia as early as 1620, to Massachusetts in 1629, and to the French settlements in 1665. John Josselyn found plenty of horses in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, "and here and there a good one." Their owners let most of them scavenge in the wilderness for their own feed, even in winter, though the practice brought the animals "very low in flesh till the spring, and so crest fallen, that their crests never rise again." Josselyn was from Europe where horses were very expensive, and worth taking good care of. In North America they were relatively cheap and wandered free, often with little more evidence of their connection with humanity than collars with a hook at the bottom to catch on fences as they tried to leap over them in order to graze on the crops. Hogs, incidentally, were collared with triangular yokes, so they could not push through fences. Fences were not for keeping livestock in, but for keeping livestock out.

Runty stallions made so much trouble by impregnating valuable mares that statutes were passed requiring their penning or gelding. In Pennsylvania anyone finding a stallion under thirteen hands running free had the legal right to geld him on the spot. Wild horses were a major frontier pest. By 1671 in Maryland, for instance, they were mentioned as a serious threat to crops, and at least as early as the turn of the century they were deemed a nuisance on the Virginia frontier. Robert Beverley of that colony recorded that there were many horses in the upland woods:

> [They were] as shy as any Savage Creature. These having no mark upon them, belong to him that first takes them. However, the Captor commonly purchases these Horses very dear, by spoiling better in

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the pursuit, in which case, he has little to make himself amends, besides the pleasures of the Chace. And very often this is all he has for it, for the wild Horses are so swift, that 'tis difficult to catch them; and when they are taken, tis odds but their Grease is melted, or else being old, they are so sullen, that they can't be tam'd.

In sugarless British North America, honey was the chief sweetener, and Europeans imported honey bees early. The bees arrived in Virginia in the early 1620s, where honey became a common food in the seventeenth century. The bees came ashore in Massachusetts no later than the 1640s, and by 1663 were thriving "exceedingly," according to Josselyn. The immigrant insects achieved naturalization in the seventeenth century and swarmed again and again, moving into the interior faster than their alleged masters. The first honey bees west of the Mississippi are supposed to have settled in Mme. Chouteau's garden in St. Louis in 1792.

Oddly enough, very few of the creatures native to North America have ever gone wild in Europe: the grey squirrel, the muskrat, a few pestiferous insects like the Colorado potato beetle—and then the list trickles to a close.

Pathogens

The often self-propelled spread of European forage plants and feral animals in North America was crucially important to the spread of the Old World humans, providing them with cheap meat, milk, leather, and power. But it probably would not have been sufficient in and of itself to have enabled them to accomplish a demographic and military takeover, if the Amerindians had been able to survive the onslaught of the portmanteau biota in anything like their original numbers, as they should have been able to do. They, after all, were capable of learning how to benefit from the exotic plants and particularly the new animals, and did so in many cases, such as the Sioux with horses, and the Navaho with sheep. A greater variety of food and access to more power than ever before should have stimulated their population growth. Instead, the birth rate of the Amerindians plunged, and the death rate soared. Every tribe shrank in numbers initially, and many of them died out completely.

The Amerindians suffered greatly from brutality and alcohol, from the destruction of their game and loss of their farm land, and so on and so on. There is no end to the telling of the suffering of native Americans at the hands of the invaders. But all this still seems insufficient to explain their near extinction. South African Bantu went through much the same experience, and are today what they were a hundred and two hundred years ago—the great majority of the people living in Africa south of the Tropic of Capricorn.

Evidence of Old World pathogens, the Amerindians' worst enemy, appeared early in the written record of the Americas. In

1493 Columbus landed in Spain with seven Taino Amerindians to show to Ferdinand and Isabella. In less than a year five of the seven were dead from unstated causes. In 1495 Columbus dispatched 550 Amerindian slaves to Spain. Two hundred died on the voyage, and 350 were put to work as field hands. The majority of these soon were dead because, said a contemporary, "the land did not suit them." What killed these Amerindians? Spanish brutality? What motive would the Spanish have had in destroying their hard-won mascots and servants? A generation later Jacques Cartier returned from Canada to France with ten Amerindians. In seven years all were dead but one, a young girl. The nine died of disease, and we must suspect that Columbus's Tainos did too.

When the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth in 1620, they did so at the site of a village and on a coast nearly cleared of Amerindians by a recent epidemic. The thousands who had lived there had, wrote one of the newcomers, "died in a great plague not long since; and pity it was and is to see so many goodly fields, and so well seated, without men to dress and manure the same."

It is impossible to list, much less discuss, all the epidemics that decimated the Amerindians. Let us concentrate on one disease, probably the worst and certainly the most spectacular: smallpox. It had long existed in Europe, but had not been among the deadliest killers in the Middle Ages. Then in the sixteenth century it increased in malignancy, and for the next three hundred years was one of Europe's most widespread killers, carrying off a high proportion of every generation's newborn. These three centuries encompassed the entire colonial period for North America.

The first epidemic of smallpox in America flared up in Espanola at the beginning of 1519 and spread to the mainland, where it was the chief and indispensable ally of the *conquistadors* in Mexico and Peru. The first *recorded* epidemic of the disease in British and French North America detonated among the Algonkins of Massachusetts in the early 1630s. "Whole towns of them were swept away, in some not so much as one soul escaping Destruction." William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation described just how hard the pox hit the Algonkins, providing details on how the death rates in epidemics among the Amerindians could soar higher, far higher, than the virulency of the malady *per se* would suggest possible. So many were sick at one time, he wrote, that "they were in the end not able to help one another, no not to make a fire nor fetch a little water to drink, nor any to bury the dead." When they ran out of fuel, they burned what was within reach—their trays, dishes, and even their very bows and arrows. Disease can kill not only by overwhelming the immune system, but also by overwhelming society.

Smallpox raged through New England, on west into the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes region, and from there no one knows how

much farther. In the 1630s and 1640s the populations of the Iroquois and Huron confederations fell by an estimated fifty percent. Thereafter, smallpox seems to have been active somewhere in the continent nearly every decade until its final eradication in our century. In 1837-38, to cite a terrible outbreak, it killed nearly all the Mandans and perhaps half the people of the high plains. Every European people to establish major settlements in North America—the English, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Russian—recorded sometimes in gloom, sometimes in exultation, the horrors of smallpox running loose among Amerindians who had never known it before.

What imported disease meant for the indigenous people of the New World is neatly expressed in a legend of the Kiowas of the southern Great Plains, who suffered at least three and probably four epidemics of smallpox in the nineteenth century. Saynday, the mythic hero of the tribe, comes upon a stranger dressed in a black suit and a tall hat like the Christian missionaries. The stranger speaks first:

> "Who are you?"
>
> "I'm Saynday. I'm the Kiowa's Old Uncle Saynday. I'm the one who's always coming along. Who are you?"
>
> "I'm smallpox."
>
> "Where do you come from and what do you do and why are you here?"
>
> "I come from far away, across the Eastern Ocean. I am one with the white men—they are my people as the Kiowas are yours. Sometimes I travel ahead of them, and sometimes I lurk behind. But I am always their companion and you will find me in their camps and in their houses."
>
> "What do you do?"
>
> "I bring death. My breath causes children to wither like young plants in the spring snow. I bring destruction. No matter how beautiful a woman is, once she has looked at me she becomes as ugly as death. And to men I bring not death alone, but the destruction of their children and the blighting of their wives. The strongest warriors go down before me. No people who have looked at me will ever be the same."[1]

The invaders took a sunnier view of imported disease. For them smallpox was a nearly endemic infection that afflicted most children, killed many, left the survivors immune, and usually left people of productive maturity alone. John Winthrop, first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and a lawyer by training, noted on 22 May 1634, "For the natives, they are neere all dead of small Poxe, so the Lord hathe cleared out title to what we possess."

The New World, in return for smallpox and such, had very little to offer. Charga's disease and Carrion's Disease are native to

[1] Quoted in abbreviated form from Alice Marriott and Carol Rachlin, *American Indian Mythology* (New York: New American Library, 1968), 174-5.

the Americas, but have never been important in the Old World, nor even in North America. Venereal syphilis may be American; it was first recognized in Europe shortly after Columbus's return in 1493, but its ultimate origins are a matter of great controversy. Even if we accept it as America's one great contribution to the Old World's pool of infections, it is no match for the list of maladies that crossed the Atlantic in the other direction.

Explanations

The exchange of pathogens between the Old and New Worlds has been almost entirely one-way, as with the exchange of weeds and animals. No wonder the white Social Darwinists of the nineteenth century thought that actual laws of nature were operating to make Europeans the masters of the earth. They were wrong, of course, but there were certain biogeographical realities—not laws, but realities, all the same—which operated to buoy up European imperialism for a period of generations. European imperialists were riding a tidal wave of biological revolution. Biological divergence had been the rule on the planet for scores of millions of years. Then the Europeans, with their ships and, eventually, planes reversed that, and substituted biological convergency.

Why was the portmanteau biota so triumphant in America (and, incidentally, in Australia and New Zealand)? Several general answers come to mind.

One, the portmanteau biota succeeded because it was composed, for the most part, of what we can call weed species, whether they were plants or not. By that I mean organisms that thrive in ephemeralized environments, environments of disruption. For instance, when fire swept the cane brakes of the southeastern United States, white clover swept in to take over the scorched land faster than any native plant. When Europeans and Africans drove off native carnivores of the same region with musket and poison, the chief beneficiaries were not the indigenous herbivores, but feral pigs, cattle, and horses. When hunger and general stress wore down the resistance of the Amerindians, the infections that took them the rest of the way to their graves were not American, but the "hectic fevers" of the Old World—respiratory diseases such as imported varieties of tuberculosis, whooping cough, and influenza.

Two, the portmanteau biota was composed of species from very large ecosystems characterized by a high degree of competition, which produced fecund, tough organisms. For instance, feral Spanish cattle, whose ancestors had survived hundreds of generations being trailed by lions and wolves, found American carnivores unpleasant but tolerable companions. The feral longhorn could outfight or outrun or out-think or certainly out-reproduce any enemy in south Texas, with the sole exception of humans.

Three, the portmanteau biota included many small and invasive organisms—most importantly micro-organisms—that had taken on many of their most significant characteristics in the unique crucible of Old World civilization, where large concentrations of humans and animals—pigs, sheep, chickens, rats, mosquitoes, etc.—lived in intimate contact and in dense concentrations. For instance, the pathogens of smallpox, malaria, influenza, measles, rinderpest, and distemper were micro-organisms that first evolved in the special conditions of Old World civilization, with its intermingling crowds of humans and other creatures. Such conditions were very rarely common outside the Old World, and so the Americas lacked many of the Old World diseases or their equivalents. They, for instance, had nothing like the Old World's smallpox, so closely related to and probably of the same origin as cowpox and horsepox. So it is no wonder that Pocahontas fell ill at about twenty years of age and died while on a visit to England, as did at least three of her entourage of nine or ten Algonkins; but that Captain John Smith lived into his fifties, though he traveled widely and exposed himself to the germs of the English, French, Italians, Austrians, Hungarians, Transylvanians, Turks, and Amerindians.

Four, the portmantau biota was composed of many mutually-supportive organisms. The invading livestock destroyed the native American grasses and forbs, opening the way for European grasses and forbs, which in their turn provided durable forage for the livestock. The Europeans and Africans, meanwhile, did all they could to kill off the cougars and wolves that would otherwise have limited the number of the invading livestock, which would have kept the native plants from being overgrazed, and preserved the pre-Columbian American ecosystem from irrevocable disruption for another year or two.

In summation, Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic in 1492 and opened a period of massive exchanges between the Old and New Worlds. The influence of his voyages on the history of commerce, religion, the nation-state, war, and literature has been immense. But his greatest impact has been the one to which we have paid least attention: his biological impact. Its victims have been many—passenger pigeons, Carolina parakeets, Wampanoags, Omahas, Modocs, Comanches, and so on. Among its most obvious beneficiaries are the humans who make up the great majority of the population of North America.

III

Christopher Columbus: The Hero and the Historian

by Helen Nader

The Historian Confronts the Hero

This country, with its great mixture of the old and new, the western and eastern, is the product of a single event in history—the daring enterprise of one man, Christopher Columbus. Surely few individuals in history have had such profound and long-lasting effect on the history of the world. Yet we have two mixed and opposing reactions to Columbus. Instinctively, as ordinary citizens, we recognize him as a hero: his name is known to all schoolchildren in America, and the year 1492 is virtually the only date that most American adults can accurately recall. At the same time, we historians find it hard to justify giving credit to just one person for such momentous consequences. As social scientists, we teach that great change occurs slowly over long stretches of time—not in weeks or months—and through the operation of large social and economic forces, not through the efforts of a single person. And so we deny the individual accomplishment. We withhold credit from Christopher Columbus, not by denying that he discovered America, but by denying him as a historic person. We do not see him as a whole man, a son and young apprentice, a husband and father, a member of a large and enterprising merchant community. It is this historic Columbus, the man, that I hope to retrieve here.

During most of my life, I never thought much about the discovery of America. I cannot say that I ever doubted that America existed or that Europeans discovered it; I never took seriously the claim that there could be no discovery because the Indians were already here and knew all about it; nor was I convinced by Edmundo O'Gorman's clever argument that it was not a discovery until Europeans accepted that it was a new continent rather than a part of Asia.

It was more than just thinking that someone was bound to discover it sooner or later. No, I subscribed to the most sophisticated historical methodologies. I spent years in graduate school learning to be a professional historian and, if there was one thing

that a historian knew, it was that the great man theory was not useful. Great men did not make historical changes: large social and economic forces brought about historical change. I was a committed social scientist. I studied groups of people, broad economic movements, underlying institutional structures that changed ever so slowly over time. And so I passed several years thinking, and researching, and writing about these big topics in social and intellectual history that command the attention and respect of other professional historians.

Still, I was called upon quite regularly to talk to community audiences. This happened almost every year when a club or school wanted to have someone come and talk about Christopher Columbus on Columbus Day in October. I am, after all, a historian of Renaissance Spain, so people just assumed I knew all about Christopher Columbus. Well, I did not, because it did not seem important to me to know such details about a single person. I always talked about the "important historical questions" instead.

Then, in 1982, when I was giving another Columbus Day talk, this time to a campus organization, I realized that in just ten years we would have reached five hundred years since Columbus discovered America. I was ecstatic. Surely, there would be a great celebration, with fireworks and tall ships and parades, just as there had been in 1976 for the bicentennial of the American Revolution. For the first time in my career, people would not think my subject was weird and obscure. It would be the subject that everyone would want to know about. Finally, my specialization in the history of Renaissance Spain would be *relevant*.

Not true. No one else was thinking about it. Everyone else wanted to see the past as social science, too, with no time or respect for single events or individual heroes. The United States government had no plans to celebrate the discovery. My colleagues in Italian Renaissance studies just shrugged their shoulders—how could the Columbian discovery compare with the dazzling Italian Renaissance? My friends who work on Spanish history just looked puzzled when I mentioned it. They, too, were serious scholars who thought such things were frivolous. The historians of the United States were simply adamant that the Columbian discovery had no place in courses on U.S. history. To put it into their course schedules, they would have to take out something else they considered more important. Most daunting of all, however, was the emotional reaction. Most scholars of Indian history considered the Columbian discovery a tragedy, not something to be celebrated, and this is true whether we are speaking of Indians in the present-day United States or in Mexico or Peru or the Caribbean. All of these reactions that I encountered in conversations with other historians have been around for a long time, and they have shaped how we study and teach about the earliest written history of our nation. Even though

we recognize the validity of these intellectual approaches, and even if we agree with all of these politically motivated interpretations, we need to respond to the public demand for understanding our national roots.

The public demand is for the individual person and the narrative story. The ordinary citizen understands intuitively that the Columbian discovery was the same mixture of brilliance and befuddlement that makes up every crucial event in history. Through the people and the narrative, we can raise important and stimulating questions of broad significance. How does the individual fit into historical change? What responsibility do individuals carry for the unforeseen consequences of their actions?

The more we know and understand the man Christopher Columbus, the more we can understand how this nation evolved from the encounter between the Old World and the New, and the great social and economic changes that historic encounter set into motion. The three most influential aspects of Columbus's background on the future development of world history were (1) his birth, apprenticeship, and citizenship in the Republic of Genoa, one of the world's great international commercial empires; (2) his marriage in Portugal and trading career in the Portuguese Atlantic islands and African colonies; and (3) his career as an agent of the Spanish monarchy—exploring, settling, and conquering the New World on the pattern of Spanish society. Columbus thus embodied three of the most dynamic expressions of Renaissance Europe: Italian wool entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean, Portuguese commercial initiative in the Atlantic, and Spanish expansion to new lands. Here, I shall focus on the first and the last, on Christopher Columbus as a Genoese wool merchant and on Christopher Columbus as a representative of the Spanish monarchy.

Young Columbus, The Wool Merchant

We know a great deal about the family and early years of Christopher Columbus. In fact, we have more documentary evidence for his youth than we do for the childhood of George Washington. From parish registers, the records of the wool guild in the city of Genoa, and notarized contracts for marriage settlements, wills, and property sales, we can see Christopher Columbus in the context of his parents, his brothers and sisters as they married and went into business, and his own early career as a wool entrepreneur. From these records, we know that Christopher Columbus was born in the city of Genoa between August 25 and October 31, 1451. His father was a member of the wool guild, the *lana*, and therefore was involved in the business of buying raw wool, having it manufactured into cloth, and then marketing it throughout the European commercial world.

This means that Christopher Columbus was part of the most important and cosmopolitan economic activity of Europe in his age. Apart from agriculture, the manufacture and sale of wool cloth was the biggest sector of the European economy during the age of Columbus. More people made their living in textile manufacture and marketing than from any other industry. Construction, the next largest sector of the economy, was a distant third in numbers of workers and volume of transactions. The wool guild, the *lana*, was the most powerful industrial group in every Italian city-state, controlling the political offices and the commercial life of the city.

The members of the *lana* were commercial entrepreneurs, not weavers themselves. They bought the raw wool and subcontracted it to wool washers, carders, spinners, and weavers in the countryside to be made into wool cloth. The most successful members of the *lana* accumulated enough capital to go beyond this putting-out stage and become dealers in finished bolts of cloth for the international market. Christopher Columbus himself tells us that he spent years engaged in this wool trade, buying bolts of wool cloth in Genoa, trading them by ship to the eastern Mediterranean, to southern Italy, to the north African coast, and to the ports of Barcelona, Valencia, and Seville in the western Mediterranean. He was, in short, a buyer and seller of cloth and other merchandise in an age when this was the most lucrative and prestigious economic occupation of Europe.

It was in the pursuit of merchandise and profit that Columbus expanded his travels beyond the Mediterranean. As he tells us, Columbus traded in the Atlantic ports of Portugal, England, the Madeira Islands, and northern Spain. By 1476, he had been at sea as a traveling merchant for most of his young life, and he had acquired enough status and resources to be eligible for a good marriage.

Columbus had the good fortune to make a marriage in Portugal, the most dynamically expanding commercial nation in the Atlantic. Sometime before 1485, he married dona Felipa Monis de Perestrello, daughter of the first proprietary captain of the island of Porto Santo in the Madeiras. Through marriage to a Portuguese woman, he acquired some of the rights of Portuguese citizenship. These included the right to engage in Portugal's new trade in merchandise and slaves in trading posts on the coast of Africa.

Columbus's years of experience as an Italian wool merchant and his participation in the Portuguese sea trade with Africa were experiences that shaped his mentality, his ambitions, and his negotiations with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. He would try to acquire from the Spanish monarchs what his Portuguese in-laws had acquired from the Portuguese king.

Columbus as an Agent of the Spanish Monarchy

From 1485 to 1492, Christopher Columbus traveled to Spanish ports and commercial cities several times. Recent research by Spanish historians has brought to light contracts between Columbus and other Genoese merchants in Spain, forming short-term partnerships in the cities of Seville and Cordoba. We used to think that Columbus came to Spain and just stayed there, living off of the generosity of some monks on the coast, but that idea has now been shown to be fiction. Instead, Columbus was traveling from one market and one port to another, probably still engaged in the African trade, and seeing his wife and small children several times a year.

Throughout these seven years of travel in and out of Spain, Columbus was trying to get an interview with the king and queen, Ferdinand and Isabella. He wanted to propose a contract similar to the one that his Portuguese in-laws had for the island of Porto Santo. That would give him the right to establish trading posts on any islands he might discover by sailing west across the Atlantic to the Indies. Apparently, he thought there would be islands all across the ocean that he could use for provisioning and trading on the way to the great commercial markets of China and Japan. The contract he finally negotiated with Ferdinand and Isabella, the famous *Capitulaciones de Santa Fe*, in April 1492, provided for just this sort of arrangement. Columbus was to have proprietary command of trading posts and the right to invest in and take profits from all commercial activities in the islands he might discover.

As we know, however, things did not turn out exactly the way he expected. There was no chain of islands across the Atlantic. America was not Asia. Adjustments had to be made. And both Christopher Columbus and the Spanish monarchs struggled for years to renegotiate the terms under which the original contract could be satisfied and, at the same time, incorporate the unanticipated results of the discovery into the Spanish way of life. The conflict between these two objectives became the dominant theme of Columbus's later life.

For the New World, these contradictions and their resolution would become crucial. The genius of the Spanish monarchs was displayed in working out the problems, resolving the contradictions, and adapting to local conditions in the Caribbean. All of these were worked out over a period of ten years, between 1492 and 1502, in new contracts, letters, and agreements between Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand and Isabella. Columbus collected all these contracts into a set of documents, the *Book of Royal Privileges*. These contracts are the best source of information about what Columbus, Ferdinand, and Isabella intended to achieve in the New World, how they had to compromise in the face of New World

realities, and how the interests of natives and colonists were subordinated to those of Columbus and the monarchs.

Reinterpreting the History of the Hero

Scholars interested in Christopher Columbus—in the colonies he and his successors established in the New World, in the society that supported and then imprisoned him, and in the explorers who imitated him—must consider the documents that Columbus believed defined his status as the admiral of a new world living in an old world. Columbus regarded the *Book of Royal Privileges* as the most important document he could leave to posterity: he selected the royal documents to be included in the collection, commissioned several notarized copies of the collection, sent two copies to his associates in Genoa, and deposited two more for safekeeping in Spain. One of those copies, made in Seville in 1502, was purchased by the Library of Congress at the beginning of the twentieth century. This document, known as the Washington Codex, may be the only artifact in the United States that Christopher Columbus actually held in his hands. Documents this old go through the same processes as human beings—they age, suffer catastrophes, and get lost. To have this valuable document survive for five centuries, therefore, is itself a story of resilience and good luck.

The *Book of Royal Privileges* is the legal foundation upon which the colonization of both North and South America rested. The royal documents instructed Columbus to colonize the New World and authorized him to establish a system of governance that would both assure an orderly and productive replica of the Castilian homeland and attract the native Indians to the Christian faith. At the time, these objectives were not seen to be inherently contradictory nor inappropriate for the Americas. Almost immediately, however, tensions and conflicts erupted out of the volatile mixture of the monarchs' intentions expressed in the *Book of Royal Privileges*, Columbus's commercial objectives, and the self-interests of native Indians and Spanish colonists. From 1498 on, most parties to the conflicts tried to justify and explain their own actions: Columbus in his letters, memoranda, and *Book of Royal Privileges*; Bartolome de las Casas on behalf of the Indians; Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo from the perspective of the Spanish colonists and officials; Andres Bernaldez and Ferdinand Columbus in defense of Columbus.

For Columbus, the contracts were vital to his own fortune. The royal documents granting the discoverer governing powers and a share of the trade in the New World shaped the success and failure of Columbus's career in Spain and defined the profit he and his heirs would receive from the New World. During Columbus's lifetime and for 250 years after his death, the wording, intentions, and precedents of the documents in the *Book of Royal Privileges* were

the subjects of litigation brought by the Spanish monarchs, the Columbus family and its descendants, and Columbus's pilots, navigators, rivals, and imitators.

The Book of Royal Privileges contains documents ranging chronologically from a grant issued in 1405 by King John I appointing Alfonso Enriquez as admiral of Castile to notarial certificates of the authenticity and accuracy of the copies Columbus commissioned in 1502. The most widely known documents in the collection are the Agreement of April 17, 1492, between Columbus and King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, and the Bull of Demarcation of 1493.

The texts were collected and copied in two stages. Shortly before his third voyage in 1498, Columbus commissioned notaries in the city of Seville to make copies of about thirty-five royal documents. These documents are of two types: warrants and commissions from 1492 through 1494 appointing him admiral and governor of the Indies, and contracts, pay vouchers, and instructions dated 1497 preparatory to the third voyage. Columbus carried one copy, the Veragua Codex, completed in March, 1498, with him on the third voyage. (The fate of the other 1498 copies is unknown.)

In the city of Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola, the Admiral commissioned notarized copies of several royal documents that he had brought with him but had not included in the Veragua Codex. His purpose may have been to leave one copy in the city of Santo Domingo with his lieutenant governor, his brother Bartolomew, while the Admiral toured the island to impose order on the colonists who had rebelled against Bartolomew's administration during Columbus's absence in Spain.

Back in Spain, Columbus was indicted on charges of irregularities in his administration of justice on Hispaniola. The courts exonerated him, but the monarchs stripped him of his offices as viceroy and governor general of the Indies while authorizing other captains to make exploratory voyages. Columbus, before his fourth voyage in 1502, commissioned four more copies, adding about ten items. The new additions include a royal mandate ordering restitution of his property, and legal opinions as to Columbus's rights to a share of the royal revenues from the Indies and his rights and privileges as admiral.

The Seville notaries finished copying this full set of about forty-five documents on March 22, 1502. Columbus sent two parchment copies of this set, bound and cased, to Genoa (Codices Genoa and Paris) and deposited a third in the monastery of Las Cuevas near Seville, along with the original documents (not extant). The fate and location of the third and fourth codices are not known, but it is assumed that the Providence Codex may be the remnants of one and the Washington Codex may be the other. The Genoa and Paris Codices have different covering letters and supplementary materials because, although Columbus sent them to the same person

in Genoa, he entrusted them to separate carriers who departed from Seville about a month apart. Most of these codices remained safe but unused in their Italian and Spanish depositories.

The Veragua Codex, however, belonged to Columbus's son Diego Colon and became a living document, the focus of nearly three centuries of litigation between the Castilian monarchy and Columbus's descendants, the dukes of Veragua. As the claims and counterclaims followed one another with conflicting interpretations of portions of the *Book of Royal Privileges*, the courts admitted evidence from an ever-widening range of eyewitnesses and experts to define ever-smaller segments of the text.

The development emerged as early as 1512 in the first two lawsuits. Diego Colon entered the Veragua Codex as evidence in the lawsuit he brought against the monarchy to claim the revenues and offices granted to his father in 1492. The courts ruled in Diego's favor in 1511, restoring the title of viceroy and granting him the full revenues and powers of the 1492 contract.

The monarchy initiated a countersuit, settled in its favor in 1512, arguing that Columbus's grant extended only to those places he discovered himself. This argument was based on a strict reading of the 1492 contract and on the claims of eight captains who carried out authorized voyages of discovery between 1499 and 1503.

For us, as people of the New World, the contracts have a much broader significance. They shaped our society and, because of their importance, have been almost constantly objects of dispute. This lawsuit is of particular interest to scholars because it contains depositions by participants in all the authorized voyages of discovery between 1499 and 1503. The eyewitness descriptions of flora, fauna, people, topography, equipment, and navigation are an invaluable source of information for natural scientists, geographers, cartographers, and ethnographers.

We must keep in mind, however, that these accounts are self-interested, the witnesses attempting to claim discoveries in order to preserve for themselves a share of the revenues and positions granted in their royal authorizations. They were well aware that their own royal concessions were modeled on the monarch's 1492 agreement with Columbus and that their rewards would depend on the court's interpretation of the Veragua Codex.

Scholars studying the Columbus litigation and the colonization of the New World require an understanding of the terminology in the Veragua Codex. The translations of the *Book of Royal Privileges* currently available cannot provide this understanding, even to those fluent in Spanish. The two printed English translations, both published in the nineteenth century, are antiquated and inaccurate.

The anonymous 1823 translation of the Genoa Codex is riddled with Italianisms and inexplicably confuses the names of a few, key

monarchs of the early fifteenth century. The fact that this quaint translation is not readily available is a blessing.

The 1893 translation of the Paris Codex was published before the discovery of the Washington Codex (1901), and before scholars identified the Veragua Codex (1951). Nevertheless, the 1893 publication closely supervised by Benjamin Franklin Stevens is a superb example of the book publisher's art. The quality of the paper, printing, and binding make it a jewel in the collections of rare book libraries. The American bibliographer and Hispanist Henry Harrisse wrote a lucid and intelligent introduction. Photoreproductions of the Codex are matched page for page by George F. Barwick's transliteration and his translation into the English legalese of 1893. The archaic flavor of Barwick's English is not a serious obstacle for modern scholars, but the translation is careless and inept.

Some of Barwick's most obvious errors are the result of simple carelessness. The year 1496 in his transcription, for example, is rendered as 1497 in his translation. Some of his inaccuracies can be attributed to defects in the manuscript he was working with. In one place, for example, his translation is garbled because the word *declaradas* is missing in the Paris Codex. Some lapses in Barwick's translation reveal his unfamiliarity with the documents of fifteenth-century Castile. For example, he fails to translate *continuo*, as if its meaning was obscure, although this word regularly appears in pay vouchers of the period. Most of the inaccuracies in the 1893 translation, however, seem to be the result of using modern definitions for fifteenth-century terms. The word *labrador* before the modern period meant "farmer," or specifically a farmer who owned one or more plow teams. Barwick translates it as "laborer," the preferred meaning given in modern dictionaries, and consequently he gives a false impression of the people Columbus brought on the third voyage to colonize Hispaniola. Another type of error in Barwick's translation arises from his excessive consistency. A Spanish word with several meanings, such as *oficio*, can mean "office," "occupation," or "craft," depending on its context. Barwick ignores these variations and thus distorts the factual content of the documents. These errors can readily be corrected by a competent translator familiar with the language, documents, and society of fifteenth-century Castile.

There are serious historical problems in translating the *Book of Royal Privileges*. The first is the same one that the Spanish law courts took years to untangle—the meaning, intent, and precedents of the Spanish original. The documents span one of the most turbulent and innovative periods in the history of the Castilian monarchy, and the secretaries who composed and dictated them were innovating—inventing, borrowing, and adapting terminology and concepts to fit bewilderingly rapid changes in the structure and needs of the royal government. Some of the titles and offices that

Ferdinand and Isabella granted to Columbus, for example, were their own creations: the first Castilian hereditary title of duke was granted in 1475, the first governor general appointed in 1484, and the first captain general in 1492. The nineteenth-century translations do not incorporate the changing formularies of the fifteenth century. Barwick's translation of legal terms is meticulously—and therefore incorrectly—consistent from the first document in 1405 to the last in 1502.

The second problem is also historical. In 1492, Ferdinand, Isabella, and Columbus all assumed that they were negotiating terms for a relatively familiar world, Asia, made up of large cities and centralized empires and monarchies. The monarchs authorized Columbus to negotiate with the rulers he would encounter and named him their viceroy and governor general of lands he would discover en route that were not under the jurisdiction of other rulers. The jolting realization that this was not Asia and that all of what Columbus had found might become their own begins to appear in the 1497 documents and becomes clear in those added to the 1502 codices. This changing perception on the part of the monarchs is masked and flattened by Barwick's consistency and will require careful attention to subtle changes in word selection and emphases.

On the surface, the *Book of Royal Privileges* was only a business contract defining Columbus's relationship with Ferdinand and Isabella. But today, in reality, we can see that it shaped the New World's relationship with the Castilian government. The legal interpretations of the *Book of Royal Privileges* during the lawsuit became the government's norms for the settlement and commercial life of the New World, and were transformed in America by the practical realities of the encounter between Spanish colonists and natives of very different cultures.

Conclusion

The Old World experiences of Christopher Columbus shaped his encounters with the New World. His understanding of how societies and economies should work influenced the first contract with Ferdinand and Isabella. His background and personal experiences greatly influenced his choices of people who would go with him on the first voyage, and return with him on the second and third and fourth voyages to settle the Caribbean Islands and then the American mainland. His descendants inherited the offices and wealth that Columbus gained through his canny bargaining, and governed the new colonies in fact and in name for generations. Most important of all, Columbus's background as a citizen of the Republic of Genoa, as a merchant in Portugal, and as an entrepreneur sailing under contract with the king and queen of Castile

shaped his reports about the discovery. We are still living with the legacy of Christopher Columbus, and we are still struggling to get the documents right, so we can more fully understand him and his world and their effects on our world.

APPENDIX

Timetable of Events in the Life of Christopher Columbus

Family Tree of Christopher Columbus

Descendants of Christopher Columbus

Documents from *Christopher Columbus's Book of Royal Privileges*, Volume IV of *Repertorium Columbianum*

Map: The First Voyage of Columbus, 1492-93

Timetable of Events in the Life of Christopher Columbus*

1451— Columbus is born in Genoa.

1476— He arrives in Portugal following a shipwreck.

1477— He works with his brother in Lisbon, Portugal.

1479— Columbus marries Dona Felipa.

1480— A son, Diego, is born.

1482— Columbus participates in a Portuguese expedition along the northwest coast of Africa.

1484— Columbus asks King John II of Portugal to support a voyage across the Western Ocean to the Indies; his request is denied.

— His wife dies.

1486— Columbus has his first meeting with Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain; he requests support for an expedition across the Western Ocean to the Indies; the request is denied.

1487— Bartolomeu Dias sails from Portugal around the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa.

1488— Columbus visits Lisbon, Portugal to reopen negotiations with King John II and witnesses the triumphant return of Dias; he gives up hope of gaining support from King John for an expedition across the Western Ocean.

— Columbus's second son, Fernando, is born to Beatrice de Arana.

1492— Reconquest of Spain from the Muslims is completed with the fall of Granada.

— Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand agree to support Columbus's proposed expedition.

— In August, Columbus leaves Palos with three ships on his first voyage across the Western Ocean.

— In October, Columbus reaches an island in the Bahamas, naming it San Salvador.

— In December, the *Santa Maria* is wrecked; men are left on the island of Hispaniola and establish a post, La Navidad.

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* Two sources were used to construct this timetable:
(1) William L. Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History*, 5th Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflan Company, 1972); and
(2) Richard B. Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History*, 6th Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).

1493— In March, Columbus returns to Spain.
— In September, Columbus embarks on his second voyage with seventeen ships and 1,200 men.
— In November, Columbus returns to La Navidad and finds this post destroyed.

1494— In January, Columbus plants a second colony on Hispaniola and names it Isabella.

1496— The Isabella settlement fails. A new and permanent city of Santo Domingo is founded.
— In June, Columbus returns to Spain and completes his second voyage.

1497— Vasco da Gama sails from Portugal around the southern end of Africa to India.

1498— Columbus makes his third voyage.

1499— Vasco da Gama returns to Portugal from India, having sailed home around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa.

1500— Columbus is sent back to Spain as a prisoner after rebellions and charges of mismanagement had undermined his authority; Columbus wins his freedom and defends his honor, but does not regain the power he had held.

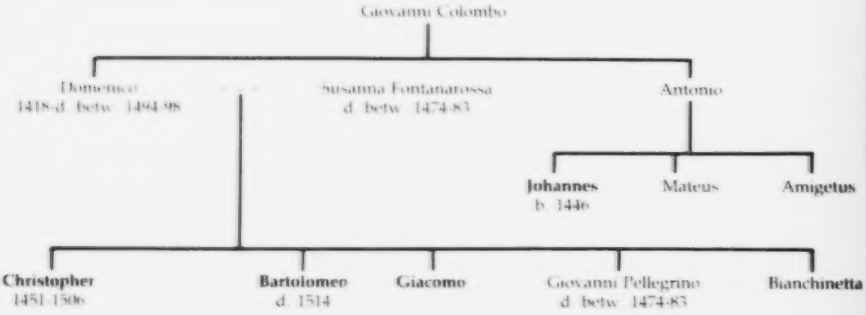
1502— Columbus makes his fourth and final voyage across the ocean.

1504— Columbus returns to Spain, never to sail away again.

1506— Christopher Columbus dies in May.

FAMILY TREE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

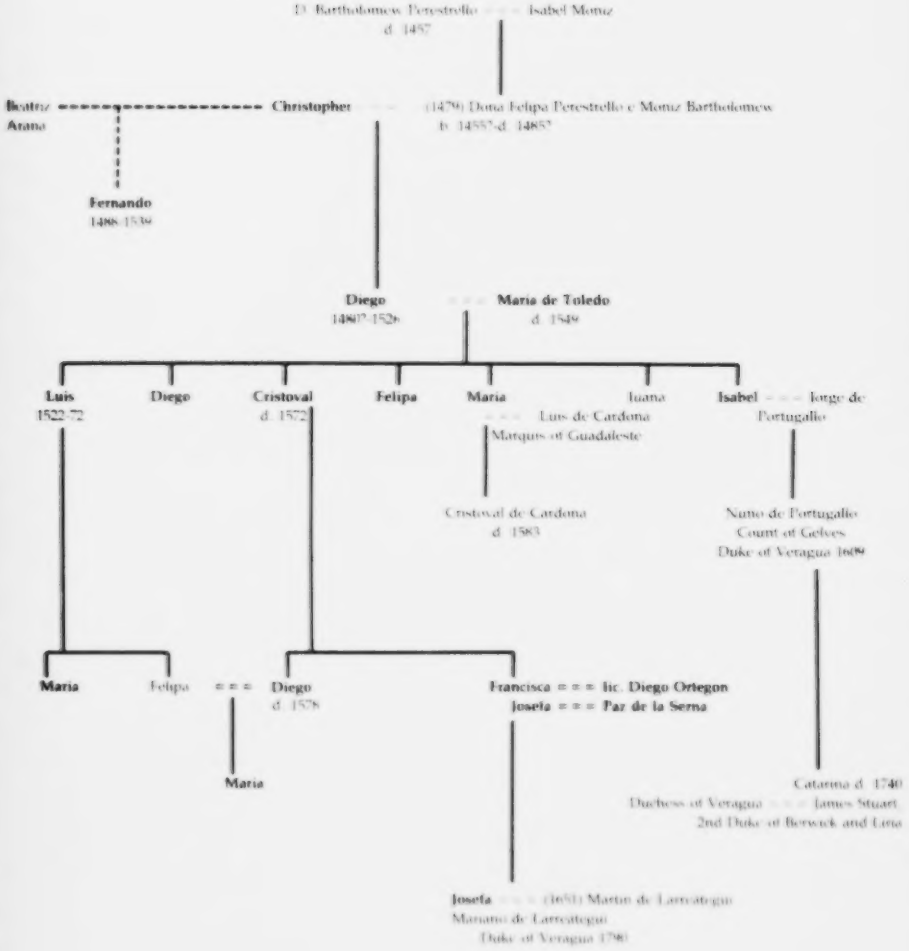
(Prepared by Helen Nader)



Bold face — lived or travelled in the New World

DESCENDANTS OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

(Prepared by Helen Nader)



Bold face = lived or travelled in the New World

Document 1

Instructions to Christopher Columbus and Antonio de Torres about settlers, supplies, and provisions for the island of Hispaniola, June 15, 1497 (*Book of Royal Privileges*, Doc. 8, Translated by Helen Nader).

The king and the queen

Don Christopher Columbus our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of the mainland and islands of the Indies, and Antonio de Torres, of our household staff. The following are the things that seem to us should be obtained and sent, with the help of our Lord God, to the Indies for the governance and maintenance of the people who are already there and will be going to do things that have to be done there for the service of God and our selves:

First, on this next voyage and for as long as this order provides, 330 persons shall go to stay in the Indies of the sort, qualities, and occupations listed below, including in these 330 persons those who are already there and remain in the Indies.[1] These same 330 persons are to be chosen by you our Admiral or by your deputy and are to be distributed in this way: 40 military officers, 100 enlisted men, 30 seamen, 30 apprentices, 20 gold miners, 50 farmers and 10 vegetable gardeners, 20 masters of all trades, and 30 women, for a total of 330 persons, who are to go and stay in the Indies as long as they wish, so that if some of those persons who are in the Indies want to come back, there will remain 330 counting those already there and those now going. But if it seem to you, the Admiral, that it is good and beneficial for this enterprise to change the number of persons, removing some artisans and appointing others in their place, you may do so as long as the number of persons in the Indies does not exceed 330.

Item: for your maintenance and that of your brothers, and other principal officials who will be going with you to stay in the Indies, and the 330 persons, and in order to plow and sow, and for the management of the animals that you are taking there, you are to take and transport 550 *cahizes* of wheat and 50 *cahizes* of barley, which can and shall be obtained from the grain that belongs to us as the royal share of the tithes of this past year of '96 in the

[1] We do not know how many Europeans were living in the Indies at this time. All thirty-eight or thirty-nine crewmen who had stayed on Hispaniola after the first voyage perished before Columbus returned in 1493. More than 1,200 people embarked on the second voyage in 1493, but they suffered a very high mortality rate (perhaps as high as fifty percent) due to disease and warfare, and many ships deserted or rebelled to return to Spain before the Admiral. The disillusioned reports of these returnees burst the euphoria in which the second voyage had been organized. Columbus had so much trouble finding emigrants for the third voyage that he resorted to recruiting convicts.

archdiocese of Seville and diocese of Cadiz, in accord with the vouchers for it that we order to be issued.[2]

Item: there shall be sent to the Indies the tools and equipment that you judge suitable for plowing in the Indies, and also appropriate mattocks, spades, picks, hammers, and crowbars.

And likewise, the cows and mares that are already in the Indies shall be brought up to the number of 20 yokes of cows, mares and asses as seem best to you the Admiral for plowing in the Indies.

And it also seems to us that it would be good to purchase an old ship to transport as much of the mentioned provisions and things as can fit in it, so that its decking, timbers, and nails could be used for the new settlement that is to be established on the other side of the Island of Hispaniola near the mines, but if taking this ship does not seem a good idea to you the Admiral then it shall not be sent.

Also, there should be taken to the Indies 50 *cahizes* of flour and up to 1,000 *quintals* of biscuit as provisions until water- and horse-mills are constructed, and to build these some millstones and other milling equipment shall be taken there.

Item: two field tents shall be taken to the Indies, costing up to 20,000 *maravedis*.

Item: whatever other supplies and provisions may be necessary to take to the Indies for the provisioning and clothing of those who are going to stay there, seem to us should be arranged in the following way:

Some creditworthy citizens should be found, such as those with whom you the Admiral claim to have tentatively contracted, to load and transport to the Indies these supplies and other things needed there, for which you are to pay using the money that we have ordered released for this purpose. They must post surety bonds for the money they receive to buy the supplies, and load and transport them to the Indies at their own expense, while the risk of loss at sea will be ours. After arriving there, God willing, they must sell these supplies; an *azumbre* of wine for 15 *maravedis*, a pound of bacon or salted mutton for eight *maravedis*, and the other staples and dried beans at the prices you the Admiral or your deputy set, so that they make a profit and not lose on this, and the people will not be cheated. The money that the said person or persons receive from these supplies sold in this way they must and will pay to our treasurer who is and will be in the Indies—the money that you are to give them in advance and that they in turn are to use for buying the said supplies—so that the treasurer can

[2] The Castilian monarchy at this time had the right to keep 2/9 (the tercias) of the church tithe on agricultural produce.

use it to pay the wages of the people. But if the people take these supplies on credit against their wages, they should receive them on account, presenting receipts for what they received so that the treasurer and accountants deduct it from their wages. These persons, having given security bonds and obliged themselves to act and perform in this way, shall be given the said quantities of *maravedis* as you see fit.

Item: it must be arranged that some monks and priests of good character should go to the Indies to administer the holy sacraments to those who are to stay there, and they should try to convert the native Indians to our holy catholic faith, and should take for this purpose whatever equipment and things are required for the service of the divine liturgy and administration of the holy sacraments.

Also a physician, a druggist, and a herbalist must go, and some instruments and music for the amusement of the people who are going to stay there.

Furthermore, we now order the release of a certain quantity of *maravedis* for the voyage which you the Admiral must now make at our command, which are to be spent according to a report signed by the High Commander of Leon, our chief accountant, and by Doctor Rodrigo Maldonado of our council, and by Fernand Alvares our secretary.

Because we order that you shall do, fulfill, comply, and put into effect all that is described above, in which you will be doing our pleasure and service, therefore we give you full power with all its attendant and rightful perquisites and responsibilities.

Done in the town of Medina del Campo on June 15, in the year of our lord Jesus Christ 1497. I the king. I the queen. By order of the king and queen, Fernand Alvares. Agreed, Rodricus doctor.

Document 2

Authorization for Columbus to apportion land on the island of Hispaniola among the settlers, July 22, 1497 (*Book of Royal Privileges*, Doc. 22, Translated by Helen Nader).

Don Ferdinand and dona Isabella, by the grace of God king and queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily, Granada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Mallorcas, Seville, Sardinia, Cordoba, Corsica, Murcia, Jaen, the Algarve, Algeciras, Gibraltar, and the Canary Islands, count and countess of Barcelona, lords of Vizcaya and Molina, dukes of Athens and Neopatria, counts of Roussillon, and Cerdagne, marquises of Oristan and Gociano. Inasmuch as on behalf of some persons who have become citizens on the island of Hispaniola and of others who want to establish citizenship there,[3] we have been asked to order that they be given and allocated land on the said island on which they could sow grain and other seeds and plant vegetable gardens, cotton and flax fields, grapevines, trees, sugarcane, and other plants, and build and construct houses, flour and sugar mills, and other structures beneficial and necessary for their living, which is to our service and the common welfare and utility of the residents of the island. Therefore, we hereby give license and power to you don Christopher Columbus, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, and our viceroy and governor of the aforesaid island, enabling you to give and allocate in every part of the island, to any and all of those who live and reside in the island now and in the future, the arable land, pasture, and water you consider suitable to give and allocate to each one according to his station and service to us, and the condition and quality of his person and lifestyle, surveying and setting boundary markers of what you give and allocate to each one, so that each may have, hold, and possess it as his own to use, plant, plow, and benefit from it, with the right to sell, give, donate, exchange, trade, alienate, encumber, and do with and on it as he wishes and thinks best as his own private property held in just and legal title. These persons are to obligate themselves to have and maintain residency by occupying their houses on the island of Hispaniola for four years continuously, counting from the day you give and hand over to them the said lands and estates.[4] They are to build houses and plant vines and gardens on the island in the manner and quantity that you think best, with the condition that over the farmland, pasture, and water

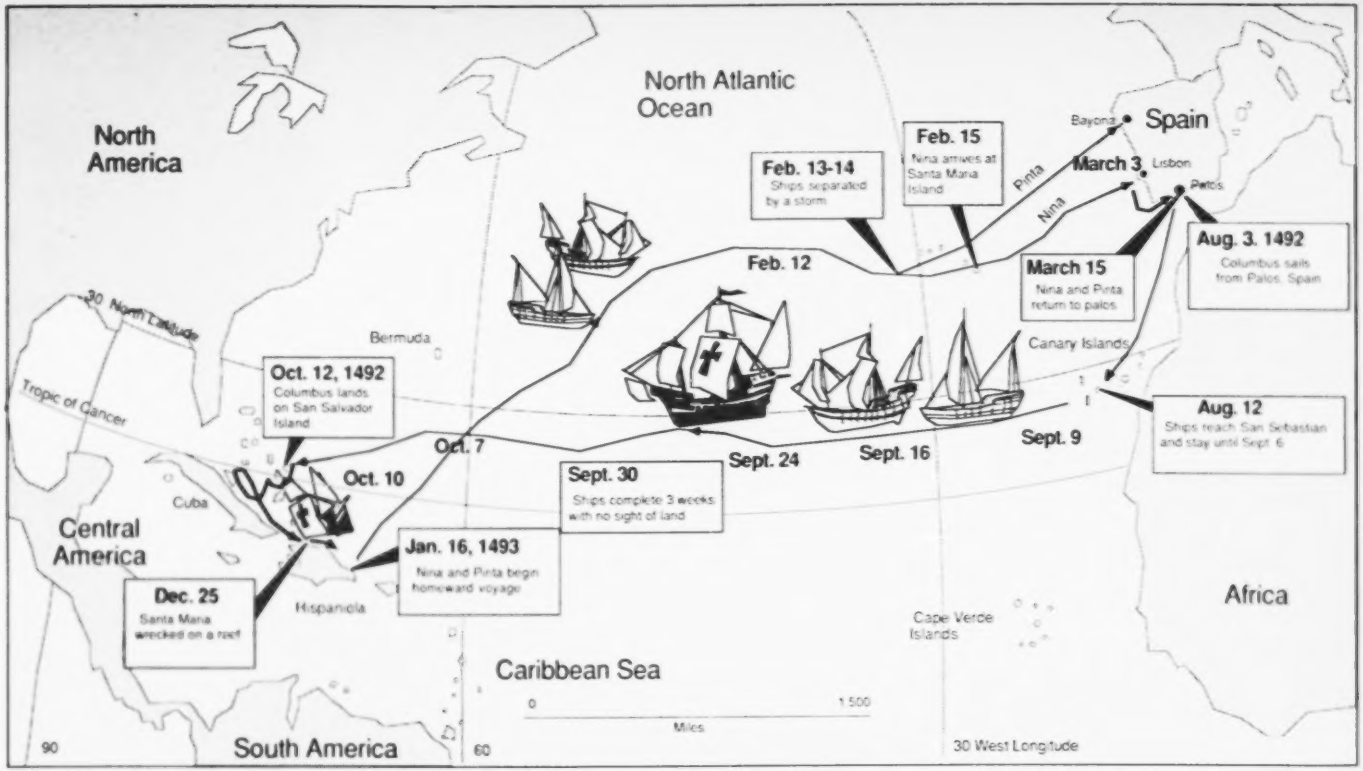
[3] Castilians who were not nobles or clergy were citizens of cities, towns, or villages. In this document, Ferdinand and Isabella are responding to the settlers' desire to establish the Castilian system of municipal citizenship in the New World, while Columbus, in the previous document, was still thinking in terms of the 'factory'—the fortified trading posts that the Portuguese established in Africa and Asia.

[4] These conditions for receiving free land were the norm in Castile. Farmers received legal title to land they cleared and cultivated. The stubble of the harvested fields and all uncultivated land were common pasture, free to all citizens of the township.

that you hereby give and allocate, the owners cannot have or exercise any civil or criminal jurisdiction nor anything exempted nor posted nor enclosed except that which they have fenced with a wall. Everything unfenced, once the produce and harvest is collected from it, is to be common pasture and free to all.

Furthermore, we reserve for ourselves the brazil-wood and any gold, silver, and other metal that might be found in those lands. Furthermore, the persons to whom you give and distribute these lands cannot load nor unload there nor in any part of those lands any metal nor brazil-wood nor any other things that belong to us and that must be loaded and unloaded by our command. They may only sow, gather, transport, and profit from the produce of their grain, seeds, trees, vines, cottonfields, and whatever else they sowed and gathered in their fields. And we desire and order that the persons to whom you give and distribute the lands in the manner described shall not be occupied nor embargoed in whole or in part, nor impeded in any way, rather they shall be allowed to freely have, possess, use, and benefit from them as stated in our charter, and no one shall do otherwise under penalty of 10,000 *maravedis* for our exchequer for every person who does the contrary.

Done in the town of Medina del Campo, July 22, 1497. I the king. I the queen. I Iohan de la Parra, secretary of the king and the queen our lords, had this written at their order. And in the margins of the said charter it said: Agreed, Rodericus, doctor. Fernand Ortix, for the chancellor. Registered, doctor.



First Voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World

August 3, 1492 — March 15, 1493

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The items in this list provide ideas and information that teachers of world history and American history will find useful in curriculum planning and classroom instruction. New perspectives on the conditions and consequences of the Columbian voyages, discussed in this volume by Alfred Crosby and Helen Nader, are treated in detail in several of the publications listed below.

Several items in this bibliography include an ED number, which identifies them as resources in the ERIC database. ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) is managed by the U.S. Department of Education. ERIC includes a nationwide network of sixteen clearinghouses, each one specializing in a particular subject. The ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education (ERIC/ChESS) is located at Indiana University's Social Studies Development Center.

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THIS PROGRAM WAS POSSIBLE THROUGH A MATCHING GRANT FROM

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ISBN 0-941339-08-4